



THE NATIONAL PREACHER.

Vol. XXXIX, No. 4.]

APRIL, 1865.

[Whole No. 258.

SERMON X.

BY THE REV. W. J. McCORD, WASSAIC, N. Y.

OBSTINACY OF SINNERS.

"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."

JER. xviii : 11, 12.

THIS passage, though spoken of the Jews, affords a good illustration of the native character of man, and may, with much appropriateness, be applied to the conduct of sinners generally.

Jeremiah is sent to the potter's house for an illustration of the Divine Sovereignty. As the potter molds the clay as he pleases, and gives it such a form as seems good to him, so God molds, governs, and disposes of nations and individuals. He does what he will with his own; he does all his pleasure. The potter wrought a work on the wheels, and it was marred in his hands: so he made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make it. O house of Israel, can not I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? Isa. xlvi. 9.

If God threaten a nation with destruction, and it repents, he spares it. If he promise to bless, and it sins, he withholds his favor. He repents of the evil and the good, that is, deals differently from what he had said, for his threatenings and promises have an implied condition ; and though a Sovereign, he is not arbitrary : he deals with men according to their deeds. "When the Scripture attributeth repentance unto God, it is not that he doeth contrary to that which he hath ordained in his secret counsel. But when he threateneth, it is a calling to repentance : and when he giveth man grace to repent, the threatening (which ever containeth a condition in it) taketh no place : and this the Scripture calleth repentance in God ; because it so appeareth to man's judgment."—" Whenever either a threatening or a promise is confirmed by an oath, the Lord is never said to repent."

The prophet is directed to make an application of these principles to the Jewish nation. They had sinned. They were threatened. If they would return, the impending judgments should be averted. But they were obstinate in their rebellion. They would not return from their evil ways, and make their ways and their doings good ; but they chose to walk after their own devices, and do the imaginations of their evil hearts.

This whole narrative is applicable to individuals, as well as to the nation of Judah, and teaches the *obstinacy of men in their impenitence*. God promises and threatens. The design is to lead men to repentance. If they repent, he will bless ; if not, he will visit them with the fierceness of his indignation.

In making an application of the text to the sinner's case, and illustrating the *obstinacy* of the impenitent, I observe :

I. *God threatens them with evil.* As he said of the Jews, so of sinners, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you.

1. He has a *right thus to threaten them*. He made them. He keeps them. They are his. In his hands as the clay in the hands of the potter ; and more absolutely and more justly at his disposal than the clay of the potter at his, for the potter made not the clay, but God made them. Yet they have rebelled against him without reason, and continue it without right. And why may not their offended and injured God threaten them ? Who will dispute his right to do so ? Shall man, sinful man ? Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth ; but woe unto him that striveth with his Maker !

2. Nor is this threatening *inconsistent with the proffered grace* of the gospel. The gospel opens a way of escape from the impending evil. Its grace comes to the relief of man in his guilt and misery. It urges him to flee from coming woe, and extends its hand to aid and hasten his escape. But if he declines its

offer, it can not rescue him. It has no authority to blot out the sentence written against the obstinately impenitent. Nay, it confirms that sentence, and adds to its weight of horror. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema ; maranatha !

3. *Why does God threaten?* Not because he delights in appealing to the fears of his creatures, nor because his government is a government of terror. He gave *man a law* which is holy, just, and good. It is just such a law as the best interests of the universe demand. It is a law spiritual in its requisitions. It requires more than external conformity to its precepts. It looks at the heart. It extends its claims to the affections. It lays its authority upon the desires and emotions of the soul. The sum of what it requires is love—love ruling in the heart and controlling the whole deportment, regulating the affections, rendering the aims elevated, the motives pure, the conduct right; love binding, by its invisible and impartial cords, the creature to the throne of God and to the vast assemblage of created intelligences, in all their varied relations, through all worlds.

And he endowed man with *capabilities to keep* this law. He made man upright, and laid upon him no burdens grievous to be borne. He required him only to love God with all his heart, to give him his supreme, impartial, and undivided affections. Disobedience, therefore, can not justify itself with the plea of inability. In this case, as there was no inability of any kind before the fall, so now there is no inability but what results from sin, from a nature depraved, from disinclination to duty and confirmed habits of transgression ; no inability which God or conscience will accept as an excuse for the transgression of the divine law.

Yet men have *broken that law* which God gave them, and which he endowed them with capacities to obey. And it is for the *violation of this law* that God threatens them. It is not without reason, therefore, that he speaks in the language of condemnation, saying, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you. His authority has been trampled upon. His government has been dishonored and despised by those who knew better and could have done better ! The Majesty of heaven has been affronted ; and shall he not speak in thunder-tones, The soul that sinneth, it shall die ?

4. The evil threatened is proportioned to *the offense*, as a *sin against God*, and to *the benefits* the law was intended to secure. These benefits are beyond human comprehension. Who can tell what this world would be, did the love, which the law requires, pervade every human breast ? Such love would make this world a heaven ! And look forth over all the worlds which God has made, and see this love shedding its benign influence every

where, beaming in every eye, and smiling in every countenance, and speaking in every action, and then conceive, if you can, the benefits intended to be secured by the law of love ; and tell me, what does the transgression of that law deserve ? What does it deserve, when it offends God and defeats, so far as it can, the benevolent designs of the law, cuts off the benefits it would secure, and introduces discord, and wretchedness, and death, and woe in their stead ? What would this world be, were there among its ruined inhabitants no love ; were all the restraints of the law, and the gospel, and conscience, annihilated ; did selfishness reign supreme in every human heart ? This world would be a hell ! And then look abroad over all worlds, see the same selfishness reigning, the guilty beings every where driving their clashing interests, fearing not God nor regarding their fellow-intelligences, and witness their mental anguish and their bodily sufferings, and remember that all this is the natural fruit of disobedience to the law of God, and tell me, if you can, what that *disobedience deserves* ? Measure the desert of transgression by the benefits which the law is intended to secure, and by the evils which its transgression involves, and the majesty of the Being it offends, and I ask whether a just and adequate *penalty* can be any thing less than everlasting punishment ?

Such is the penalty ; and it is a *just and righteous penalty*. The wages of sin is death—eternal death. It is a framed and devised evil ; an evil which God, in his wisdom, and justice, and goodness, has annexed to the transgression of his law. It is, therefore, a certain evil, one which will certainly be inflicted. It is an impending evil, hanging, as it were, over the heads of the guilty, and ready to fall upon them. It is an evil so great and terrible that it should lead men at once to repent and embrace Christ that they may avoid it. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus Christ has the keys of hell and death. He who alone can save from hell, has the keys of hell—not only of the invisible world, but of the world of woe. He will suffer none to go thither who put their trust in him ; and he will lock up in that place of torment all who will not come to him for eternal life. He is the judge of all, and having the keys of hell, he will suffer none to escape who, in this world, flee not from the wrath to come. Standing, as it were, at the gate of hell, and holding in his hand the keys of the infernal prison, he says to every sinner, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you, eternal imprisonment, eternal death ! This is the threatening, and it is fearful, awful ! Hell is the place, and the only place, of future punishment, as heaven is the only place of everlasting rest.

II. My second observation is, that, in view of the threatened evil, *men are urged to return to God*. As it was said to the Jews,

so it is said to the impenitent, Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

This exhortation is based upon the threatening which precedes, and is enforced by it. The threatenings of God, as well as his goodness, should lead to repentance. Though men have not been deterred, by these threatenings, from transgressing the law, they should be induced by them to repent of their transgressions. It is no part of true courage to disregard the warnings of Jehovah. It is wisdom to listen to them. It is grievous infatuation to affect indifference when matters of so great moment are at stake. And what shall be said of those who assume the skeptic, and affect to doubt whether these things are so? Well did the great Locke emphatically say, "If the *worst* that can happen to the believer if he mistake, be the *best* that can happen to the unbeliever if he be right, who without madness can run the venture? Who in his senses would choose to come within the possibility of infinite misery?"

This misery is threatened, and in view of the threatening, men are urged to return to God: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. Here are two things:—

1. *Return ye now every one from his evil way.* Men are gone astray. They have wandered from God and entered into forbidden paths; and God says, Return from your evil ways. Come back from your wanderings, and make your peace with me. This exhortation has a definiteness about it worthy of our serious attention. It is not simply, return; nor is it, return at some future time, when convenient; but, as Nathan said to David, Thou art the man; so it is written here, *Return ye, now, every one, from his evil way.* There is no respect of persons here; nor is there any danger that any hearer will say he was not intended. All are addressed, each and every one, Return ye now every one from his evil way.

2. *And make your ways and your doings good.* Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Let your manner of life be holy, and your whole deportment conformed to the will of God. Having returned to God, through Jesus Christ, and obtained forgiveness of sins, live as God requires. Thus shall you escape the impending wrath. Make your ways and your doings good. This will evidence the reality of your faith, the sincerity of your repentance.

Such is the *exhortation*. The sum of it is repentance, faith, and new obedience. To comply with it, is by repentance and faith, to become reconciled to God and united to Christ, and then to bring forth good fruits, as evidences of this union. This is your immediate duty; and there is nothing in your way, but

hearts at enmity with God, and confirmed habits of disobedience. "Nothing stands between the chief of sinners and eternal life, but their proud, carnal, and sinful unwillingness ;" wills enslaved by sin ; hearts at enmity with God, and confirmed habits of apostacy and rebellion.

Yet there is no merit in returning to God. We can never merit any thing. Nor does this language give a shadow of support to the notion, that, when awakened, we must make ourselves better, before we apply to the Saviour. We can never make ourselves better ; we must go to Christ just as we are. To return, and make our ways and our doings good, is not to make ourselves better, but to repent of sin and forsake it, and with broken hearts and empty hands, to embrace Christ, and then to live by faith in him, bringing forth good works as an evidence of faith. Faith in Christ is the first duty of every man ; and where there is faith, there will be returning to God, and making the ways and the doings good.

There is here an implied promise, that if men will return and make their ways and their doings good, they shall be restored to the divine favor. This is an additional reason for yielding to the exhortation. God's promises should melt the heart, and his threatenings break it. He threatens men for the violation of his law, and to lead them to accept the gospel ; and if they do this, the curse removes, and they are forgiven. They have peace with God, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

We have seen that sinners are threatened and urged to return to God. Will they do it ? Do they return from their evil ways, and make their ways and their doings good ? Let the Scriptures tell ! Let history tell ! Let observation tell ! Alas, they hold fast deceit ; they refuse to return !

III. I am led, therefore, in the third place, to notice *the obstinacy of sinners*, under all the means employed for their salvation. And they said, There is no hope ; but we will walk after our own devices, and will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. We fear not the threatening, we regard not the exhortation ; we will do as we please !—“The people either pleaded that God was a severe Master, whom there was no hope of pleasing ; and an *im* placable enemy, whom there was no hope of pacifying ; or, that there was no hope of security or prosperity, if they renounced their idols and heathen ordinances, and returned to his service ; they were therefore determined to go on in their evil ways. ‘But they said desperately, Surely we will walk after our own imaginations ; and do every man after the stubbornness of his wicked heart ! As men that had no remorse, but were altogether bent on rebellion, and to their own self-will ;’” they were stubborn, obstinate. So are sinners every where.

1. *And they said, There is no hope.* The case is desperate.

Either God is inexorable, and *will not forgive*; for with such language the impenitent will sometimes strive to excuse their impenitency. Although God has done so much, and invites them to return; yet they say there is no hope; God will not forgive! Thus they charge him with insincerity, that they may justify their own obstinacy! Or else they say, The case is now rendered desperate by our *long continued rebellion*; there is no hope! We have sinned so long and so grievously, that there can be *no forgiveness for us*; we may as well sin on, and give ourselves no trouble till death overtakes us. Thus they limit the mercy of God, and set bounds to the merits of Christ's atonement and to his ability and willingness to save, forgetting that he is able to save to the uttermost, and that he came into the world to save sinners, even the chief; and this they do that they may silence conscience, quench the Spirit, and sin on unmolested. It is not a proof of their humility, nor of their overwhelming sense of the ill-desert of sin, but of their obstinacy.

2. Hence they add, *But we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart!* Let God threaten, let him warn and entreat, let him uncover the pit at our feet and open the portals of heaven over our heads, and we will not regard it; we still will walk in the way that seemeth good unto us. Let God frame evil and devise devices against us, and we will laugh at the evil and walk after our own devices! Let him urge us to return from our evil ways, and make our ways and our doings good; and we will still pursue our chosen course, and do the imaginations of our evil hearts! Let him promise eternal life if we will but return to him; and we will spurn the offer, and walk in the way of death! Such was the language of these obstinate Jews; and such is the language of the impenitent now!

They are threatened. The law thunders out its curses against them, and the gospel utters its anathemas. But they will not obey the law. They will not begin to regulate their lives by it. They are strangers to the love it enjoins. Their unruly passions spurn its holy restraints. They will not compare their hearts and lives with it. They make no effort to conform, even externally, to its precepts. And when told that by the law they can not be justified, that the gospel opens to them the only way of escape from eternal death, and that unless they receive Christ by faith, repent and believe, they must perish in their sins, they will not take warning and comply with the gospel. Set before them all the threatenings of the word of God, flash upon their minds the warnings of the Scriptures, read to them the promises and entreaties of Jehovah, remind them of the Saviour's tears and blood, show them the agony of the garden and the astonishing scenes of the crucifixion, declare to them the interest which

angels feel in their conversion, and how the Spirit strives with their hearts, and Christians pray for them, let love plead, and tenderness invite, try every moving consideration to draw them to the cross, and what does it all avail? Are they affected? Do they yield? Alas, who hath believed our report? Oh, the obstinacy and obduracy of the carnal heart! After all that can be said, sinners will yet do as they please. They still will say, We will walk after our own desires, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart!

They say this when under affliction. Then they are warned, but they regard not the warning; they cherish their idols still, and follow their own devices. They say it when reproof is administered, and they regard it not; when duty is enforced, but they comply not; when they hear the gospel, but do not obey it. Whenever they break the law of God, or slight the invitations of the gospel, or trifle with holy things, disregard the Sabbath, desert the sanctuary, neglect the Bible, refuse to repent of sin and believe in Christ, their language is, We will do as we please; we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one the imagination of his evil heart! See how many threatenings they have, how many warnings, and promises, and entreaties; see how plain duty is made, how easy and manifest is the way of life, how much light they have, how many facilities they enjoy, how many motives and inducements; what joys they slight, what perils they encounter, the Being they disobey, and what convictions of conscience they stifle, and what strivings of the Spirit they resist, and then you may see manifested their wicked obstinacy in their rebellion. Notwithstanding all that is done for them, they will yet go on in the way to death!

“They choose the way that’s wide,
And strive to think it best!”

Christ has died. He invites them to his arms; and yet he is obliged to say, Ye will not come to me that ye might have life!

In view of the preceding observations, I remark:—

1. We see the *goodness and forbearance of God*: goodness in warning men, forbearance in bearing so long with them in their obstinacy. He might justly cut them down without warning. For the first offense, as soon as committed, he might in justice remove them to the world of despair. But he suffers them to live. He continues them in the land of hope; devises a plan of reconciliation; gives his Son an atoning sacrifice; proclaims pardon to the penitent and believing, sends his Spirit to convince of sin, makes plain the path of duty, gives warning after warning, threatens, admonishes, promises, entreats, beseeches, follows the sinner with the offers of life; cries, Turn and live; and when time after time his mercy is slighted and his Spirit

grieved, he says, How shall I give thee up? How shall I deliver thee? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Here is divine goodness! Then see how men treat all this rich display of benevolence, how light they make of what God has done to save them, how indifferent about another world, how careless about their souls, how heedless of the threatenings and warnings and entreaties of the great God himself; and yet he does not cut them off; he spares them year after year in all their guilt and obstinacy and carelessness! He who threatens sinners has an undoubted right to execute his threatenings without delay. He could wing the thunderbolt to their hearts in a moment, reduce them to nothingness, or doom them at once to unquenchable fire; yet he forbears! He bids the sword of justice slumber in its scabbard, suffers them to live on his bounty who trample on his authority, sustains them in being who pierce the Son of his love by their sins, supports them on earth who slight the heaven they have forfeited and brave the hell they deserve! Here is divine forbearance! And sinners, against this goodness and forbearance you sin! This goodness and forbearance you abuse! O let them lead you to repentance, or soon it will be too late! The sword of justice will not always sleep! The fiery indignation of God will one day burst upon you and burn to the lowest hell!

“ For goodness knows the appointed bound,
And turns to vengeance there ! ”

2. The subject teaches us the *inexcusable wickedness of men*. They transgress the law of God because their wicked inclinations lead them to do so. They pay no regard to the requirements of the law, and despise its penalty. They observe not the threatenings of Jehovah. And when the gospel comes to them in all its winning sweetness, reveals to them a Saviour slain, opens the way of life, and bids them enter, they obstinately refuse. They transgress the law because they will; they slight the gospel because they will. They are perfectly free. No fatal necessity binds them to the transgression of the law, or shuts them out from the hopes of the gospel. If they are without God, it is because they will not retain him in their knowledge; if they have no hope in Christ, it is because they will not come to him for life; if they are unrenewed by the Holy Ghost, it is because they will not ask that they may receive; if they are yet in their sins, it is because they will not repent and believe, but will walk after their own devices, and will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. They are without excuse. All has been done for them that they can ask; and they can give no reason for their impenitence and unbelief but what must aggravate their guilt, and prove the charge of obstinate and inexcusa-

ble wickedness, which Scripture and conscience and God prefer against them !

3. Hence we see the *justness of their final doom*. In the great day by what plea can you justify your impenitence ? By what arguments can you prove the injustice of your final and eternal condemnation ? Was not duty made plain here ? Was not the law holy, just, and good ? Was not the gospel clearly revealed ? Was not salvation freely offered, and offered long ? Had you not time to think, and turn from your evil ways, and make your ways and your doings good ? Were not sufficient facilities afforded ? Were not weighty and powerful motives presented ? Did not the Saviour die ? Did not the Spirit strive ? Were not heaven and hell placed before you ? Were you not urged and entreated to choose life that you might live ? And yet amid all the light which heaven scattered in your path, and notwithstanding all the motives which heaven, earth, and hell could bring to bear on your mind, you chose, freely and intelligently, in full view of the consequences, you chose the way to death, rather than repent and believe in Christ ! This I wish you to feel. You are impenitent because you choose to be so; and you are now without excuse, and in the judgment-day you will be without excuse, and the universe will see and confess the justness of your final doom ! And conscience will see and confess it, and pour its withering reproaches into your cup of woe !

SERMON XI.

BY REV. THOMAS S. HASTINGS,

PASTOR OF THE WEST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

PRAISE IN THE SANCTUARY.*

“LET the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”—Col. iii : 16.

THE text should be so punctuated as to read thus : “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another ; in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” So the verse is divided in the edition of Hahn’s Greek Testament, edited by my reverend and beloved teacher, the late Dr. Edward Robinson. This change in punctuation should not be made merely for the accommodation of those who hold that only such hymns

* Preached before the Synod of New York and New Jersey, at Honesdale, Pa., Oct. 18th, 1864, by appointment, and published by direction of the Synod.

are appropriate for use in the sanctuary, as are strictly hymns of praise ; for some of the psalms are didactic, and the rigid enforcement of such a principle would rob our hymnology of some of its choicest treasures, and would divest it of much of its practical efficiency. We accept the criticism upon the punctuation of the text ; but in the full conviction that both didactic and admonitory hymns have a right to that position in our psalmody which the experience of the Church has assigned them.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly :" when the word so possesses the heart and brain of the Church as to press for utterance, then the Church will sing, "making melody in her heart to the Lord." This has always been the case, as we shall presently have occasion to show.

The distinction which is made in the text between the different vehicles of praise must be noticed in passing. By "Psalms" we are to understand the Hebrew book of that name, which was in common use in the synagogues ; the "Hymns" were independent compositions, such as are now in use ; the "Spiritual songs" (*ωδαῖς πνευματικαῖς*) were probably such religious songs as were more appropriate for personal than for congregational uses.

"Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord,"—this determines the spirituality of the service. It must not be merely formal and artistic ; it must be such as the Searcher of hearts will receive ; it must be heartfelt and sincere. Such are the teachings of the text in relation to the theme which the Synod have assigned me—*"Praise in the Sanctuary."*

The proper limits of discourse compel me to pass by many things which it would be interesting to consider. I shall treat the subject *historically, theoretically, and practically.*

I. The history of Psalmody is full of instruction. We have time for only a brief and cursory survey. I shall presume on your familiarity with very much that belongs to this part of our discussion, and shall notice only those salient points which will aid us most directly in reaching and resting in practical conclusions.

In the days of Soloman, of the thirty-eight thousand Levites, four thousand were set apart to praise the Lord with instruments of music which David had made.* Two hundred and eighty-eight chosen cunning men were "instructed in the songs of the Lord."† So in the tabernacle and in the temple, both the instrumental and vocal performers were selected from among the Levites ; and they were not merely selected, but were specifically trained for the service of praise in the solemn assembly. You will notice here these facts : That this interest was not expected to regulate itself without special provision and culture : that it was not committed to strangers to the commonwealth of Israel ; but only to those

* 1 Chron. xxiii. 5.

† 1 Chron. xxv. 7.

who stood nearest to the altar ; and that the music was both instrumental and vocal. These are all the points that we need to emphasize in the Old Testament history of this branch of worship.

We pass on to New Testament times. It was natural that Christianity, finding art so thoroughly paganized, and so essentially involved with the old idolatries, should be slow in resuscitating and culturing even the one art which was most necessary to her, and should, for a time at least, discard all the other arts. Music she must have, but architecture, and sculpture, and painting she would not have. After a time she received them, and used them with marked effects ; but when piety declined, then the Church began to cherish the arts for their own sakes, and not for what they could do in serving spiritual ends, and this proved disastrous. Art and religion both suffered by the mistake ; for, when the Reformation dawned, art was robbed of its highest dignity and privilege, namely, to serve religion ; and so, compelled to abandon religious subjects, it turned to those which were unworthy and trivial, and was thereby degraded. In not a few churches in the Low Countries, the portraits of generals and statesmen were suspended, when a religious picture would not have been tolerated, but would have been denounced as a desecration. Whenever art has usurped the higher place, and attempted to patronize instead of promoting and serving religion, it has sooner or later been compelled to vacate not only its *usurped* but even its *rightful* throne, and to suffer a long humiliation as the just penalty of its presumption. Such is the significant and important testimony of history. But we are advancing too rapidly, and must retrace our steps for a moment.

Of the Christians of apostolic times, we read that "they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God ;" and that "they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." Our Saviour, himself, by his own example, consecrated forever the service of sacred song. I have not time to quote the testimony of Augustine, and Hilary, and Chrysostom, and of others, as to the customs of the Church in the early centuries. The primitive Christians were marked in history by the fact, that they sung hymns to the praise of Christ. Music as an art was yet in its infancy ; harmony was unknown ; and melody was only rudimentally understood. The singing of the Old Testament and of apostolic times was a mere melodic utterance of the sacred words. In the fourth century, choirs were introduced. As the art advanced, and was better understood, the effort was made more and more to deprive the people of their share in this part of worship, by introducing music which they could not sing. Ere long, the clergy entirely monopolized the service, by singing only in Latin. From the seventh century to the Reformation,

the people had no psalm nor hymn, but were silent in the sanctuary. There were indeed exceptional cases, but this was the rule.* At the dawn of the Reformation, all this was changed. In France, at the suggestion of Beza, Marot, the poet of the Court, prepared and published a version of a few of the Psalms in French rhymes. They were received with immense favor. Calvin adopted them, and published them in Geneva, with a preface from his own pen. So popular did they become in France, that the Sorbonne, though at first favoring them, felt itself compelled at length to condemn and oppose their use. Luther, as you know, was not idle. He spent much time in looking for some one who could write psalms and hymns for the people; and then published a small book in which the music and the hymns were mostly of his own composition. The people received this new treasure with the utmost avidity. Psalms and hymns became the popular ballads. At Augsburg, in 1551, three or four thousand people were often heard singing together. Burney says that at the hour of morning and evening domestic worship, whole villages were resonant with the praises of God. In the schools, founded under the supervision of Luther and Melancthon, nearly one fourth of the time was devoted to musical instruction. The epithet "*psalm-singer*" became as common and as opprobrious as *heretic*. This "infectious frenzy of sacred song," as it was styled, soon invaded England. The new want there was met and satisfied with the rude metrical version of the Psalms prepared by Sternhold and Hopkins—"men," as Fuller expressed it, "whose piety was better than their poetry, and who had drank more of Jordan than of Helicon." Their work has been much ridiculed, but, as I think, profanely; for it served a high and holy purpose, and was equal to the demands and capacities of its age. Tate and Brady followed with their popular versifications; and others not so conspicuous added more or less to the hymnology. But soon a new epoch dawned.

A Christian mother, training her children with patient care, sought to develop in them that love of poetry which was her own characteristic. After school-hours she sometimes induced them to compose a few lines, by offering them the reward of a farthing. On one occasion the older son produced this couplet:

* "I write not for a farthing; but to try
How I your farthing writers can outvie."

It was Isaac Watts. With him began the new epoch of psalmody. I need not and can not stop to pronounce the accustomed and deserved eulogy upon his name. Among the least of his honors is the fact that room has been made for

* Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles, about 500. See Neander's "Light in Dark Places," p. 76, sq.

him in Westminster Abbey. His name is inscribed upon the heart of the church forever. He was not satisfied to give us the Psalms of David, as he expressed it in his title-page, "imitated in the language of the New Testament, and adapted to the Christian state of worship;" he contended for a larger liberty and wider range. He imagined that "David would have thought it very hard to be confined to the words of Moses, and to have sung nothing else in all his rejoicing days, but the drowning of Pharaoh in the fifteenth of Exodus." Amid much and bitter opposition, he thus contended for hymns as the proper supplement of psalms, and he made his hymns not only pious, but also poetical; for, as the *North British Review* said, "God gave him as his vocation to join together those whom men had put asunder—*mental culture and vital piety*;" and so he fairly earned the designation and distinction which Mongomery gave him in pronouncing him "almost the inventor of hymns in our language." There are many names which are hallowed in our hymnology. Mrs. Steele, and Doddridge, and Cowper, and Newton, and Heber, and Montgomery, and Kirke White, and Lyte, and many others, will be held in perpetual remembrance. Next to Watts, however, his great cotemporary, Charles Wesley, born six years after Watts entered the ministry, is most deserving of the eulogy of the church. The great revival, in which he was the prominent instrumentality, gave a new and a grand impulse to psalmody. That impulse was felt in our own country. For, as Cotton Mather said: "It is remarkable that when the kingdom of God has been making any new appearance, a mighty zeal for the singing of psalms has attended it, and assisted it." During "*the great awakening*," in this country, the people so abounded in the singing of praises to God, that Edwards felt there was need of guarding and restraining influences. He wrote some cautions concerning this subject, and discussed the propriety of "companies singing in the streets going to or coming from the place of public worship."^{*} There was at this time but little general musical cultivation, either in England or in our own country. Popular secular airs, without regard to their associations or quality, were appropriated to the use of the church. The earliest musical works in this country were republications of English books. The harmonies were crude and ungrammatical. But about the time of the Revolution, the idea of independence of the mother country, so prevalent in other relations, began to be felt with reference to the music of the churches. Billings, Read, Morgan, Benham, Jenks, and others, flooded the country with light and frivolous imitations of the poorest pro-

* Edwards' Works, Vol. III. 401.

ductions of the English press. This state of things could not last. The "*Lock Hospital Collection*" and "*The Harmonia Sacra*" introduced a new era. The ministry united in earnest and effective endeavors to promote improvement in the art. The result was a great advance in musical culture. Our press began to send forth new tune-books, with increasing rapidity. After a time, every year witnessed the advent of at least one fresh claimant for popular favor. That period has virtually passed; and now the interest in hymns has been awakened to an extraordinary degree. Volume after volume has appeared, until the resources for additions to our hymnology have become accessible and affluent to an unexampled degree. The natural result has begun to follow. Hymns and tunes are being brought together. The general diffusion of musical knowledge has demanded that the tunes as well as the hymns should be placed before the people, in the manuals to be used in the sanctuary. A great number of "hymn-tune books" have appeared, and are now making their way among the people, and a still larger number are probably yet to come. The congregations *can* and therefore *will* sing; and will have the music with the words.

Must I apologize for having thus protracted this historical review? I think not; for in it we shall find such guidance and assistance for what remains to be considered as will make it possible for us to reach more speedily the desired conclusions.

II. In the light of this history let us seek and, if possible, find the true theory of psalmody.

First of all, we are impressed with the imperative claims which come from the sacredness and the power of those psalms and hymns in which the heart of the church has uttered itself in all the centuries. The importance of the hymn-book should be emphasized. We would do well to ponder Isaac Taylor's words. He says:—"In any system of public worship, the *constant* element—that is to say, the liturgical—will always exercise a great influence over the variable part—the *extemporaneous*—in giving it tone and direction, and in preserving a doctrinal consistency in the pulpit teaching. It will be so at least wherever this liturgical ingredient warmly engages the feelings of the people, and where it is performed with untiring animation. In communities that have laid aside liturgies in every other sense, the HYMN-BOOK which they use, especially if psalmody be a favored part of public worship, rules, as well the preacher as people, to a greater extent than is often thought, or than would perhaps be acknowledged. The hymn-book, to such bodies, comes in the stead of creed, articles, canons, and presiding power." These are strong, but, like all that comes to us from the

same source, they are well-weighed words, worthy of our consideration. This branch of Christian literature cannot be too highly regarded, or too carefully watched. From the beginning, the gospel has sung its way into thousands of hearts that could not have been otherwise reached.* We must magnify the meaning and power of our hymnology. It gives wings to the theology, and the thought, and the life of the church. I can not do better than to quote the eloquent words of Basil of Cæsarea, which are still fresh, though fifteen centuries old. "Psalmody," he wrote, "is the calm of the soul, the repose of the spirit, the arbiter of peace. It is the church's voice. Oh! the sapient design of our Instructor, appointing that at once we should be recreated by song, and informed by wisdom. Thus the precepts of instruction are more deeply engraven on our hearts; for the lessons which we receive unwillingly have a transient continuance; but those which charm and captivate in the hearing, are permanently impressed upon our souls. From hence may not every thing be acquired? Here the nature of penitence is unfolded; patience is here exemplified. Is there a blessing to be named which here resides not? The splendors of theology beam effulgent; Jesus is predicted; the resurrection is announced; judgment is proclaimed; the sword of vengeance is unsheathed; crowns of glory glitter; speechless mysteries astonish."

If Basil could say this, what should be said now, after there have been added to what he so eulogized, all the best products of fifteen centuries of Christian thought and aspiration? Our psalmody is full fifteen centuries richer and better than it was when Basil wrote.

Rhetoric might exhaust its affluence, and yet fail to do justice to the amplitude and sacredness and power of the language of song, with which the church has enriched and enlivened, stimulated and sustained her pilgrim march through all the centuries. This sacred language, in which the thoughts and feelings of the devout of every age have found grateful utterance, must not be concealed, but only effectively conveyed by art to the very soul of the living present. Music is sufficiently honored by the dignity of such service. The melody is for the psalm, and not the psalm for the melody. It can not be denied that music in itself, without the aid of words, has a peculiar power, which may be, and should be, consecrated to religious uses. Else why was there so much instrumental music in the worship of the tabernacle and of the temple? Why did harp, and psal-

* It is noticeable that singing is becoming more and more a power in the foreign missionary work. The gospel is being sung in the streets of oriental cities even more than it is preached, and it can be sung where it cannot yet be preached.

ter, and all the inarticulate instruments speak for the soul, and to the soul of the sweet singer of Israel? But when sacred words are committed to song, it is not that they may serve the music but that the music may serve them. If they are concealed with the redundancies of art, then they are desecrated; art is dishonored, and religion is profaned. This point is vital to the true theory of psalmody. Music is welcomed to the sanctuary, not to gratify artistic tastes, not to relieve the monotony of the services, but to honor God, by aiding the souls of the worshippers in rendering unto him the choicest expressions of their love and homage. The music should be worthy of such exalted service. It should be faultless in conception, and in tune and time and style. Only the lamb without spot or blemish should be brought to the altar of our God. "The lame and halt" will not do for the sacrifice. But the soul of the people must breathe life and power into the music, and the music must be calculated to react upon and elevate their soul. There are but two methods of addressing the throne of infinite grace—prayer and praise. Both are sacred in their nature and imperative in their obligations. Can we claim the full privilege of prayer, if we neglect the duty of praise? Is our piety scriptural, if it does not sing as well as pray? Is our spirit evangelical, if we have on our lips only a plaint, and not also a psalm? If the word of Christ dwell in us richly, if we are "filled with the Spirit," will we not need psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, that we may pour forth the fulness of our souls and make melody unto the Lord? Can we delegate to others, above all to "aliens and strangers," to the thoughtless and the godless, our personal privilege of praising our God? Will the histrionic and artistic semblance of praise answer the claims of him who searches every heart, and waits upon each for the offering which is due unto his name? This surely is preëminently a spiritual service, and a service *for the people*. It is not to be classed, without profanity, among the secularities of the church, to be regulated by merely artistic ideas, or on commercial principles.

It is preëminently the right and the privilege and the duty of the people to take part in this service, and to so educate themselves and their children, that they can worthily sing the praises of him who has said: "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me."* "The intent of singing," said Fuller, "is by a musical pronunciation of affecting truth, to render it still more affecting." "Great caution is necessary," said Calvin, "that the ears be not more attentive to the modulation of the notes, than the mind to the spiritual import of the words. Whatever music is com-

* Psalm l. 23.

posed only to delight the ear, is unbecoming the majesty of the church, and can not but be highly displeasing to God."* There must be cultivation and refinement; there must be instruction. But the process of culture must be carried on under Christian influences, and with a Christian purpose; and the end must be, that "every thing that hath breath," that "*all the people*" may unite in truly praising God. It will not do to plead, as an excuse for silence in the sanctuary, the lack of native talent. The power of speech and of song go together. Whoever can speak can be taught to sing. This has been sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore the responsibility rests upon all. All cannot become artists; but all may, and therefore should, learn to share, in some humble measure, in the exalted privilege of praising God.

Such undoubtedly is the true theory concerning this subject, and very few thinking Christian men attempt to deny this theory: but there are many who do believe it impracticable. This objection must be answered in what remains to be said.

III. We have glanced at the historical and the theoretical aspects of our theme, and it only remains to consider it practically. There have been so many difficulties with choirs and with music committees in our churches, that this subject of praise in the sanctuary has come to be generally regarded as one of the most delicate and difficult and embarrassing ones with which the church has to do. The blame is generally laid upon the singers: we are told that they are headstrong, jealous, quarrelsome, and unreasonably sensitive. There is doubtless too much ground for such charges. But the fault is not chiefly with the choir. The church does not sufficiently feel her responsibility in this grave and important matter; and what she suffers is not so much the arbitrary infliction of troublesome choirs, as it is the natural and deserved penalty of her own shameful neglect of duty. Singing in the sanctuary is a part of the worship—that is the only defensible theory. Then surely it should be regulated on the same general principles, and with at least as much care as any other part of the worship. It should not be left to the direction of the trustees, to be farmed out for the purpose of securing such talent in the choir as will furnish *regular Sabbath concerts* in the church, to supplement the insufficient attractions of the pulpit, and so to aid in renting the pews. The praise of the sanctuary should be under the immediate direction of the session, to whom is committed the charge of the spiritual interests of the church. And they should seek to dignify and exalt the service. The pastor, during the singing, should not be turning the leaves of his manuscript, or be consulting with the sexton or with an elder; he should show, by his attentive and rever-

ential manner, and, if possible, by actual participation in the service, that he is truly seeking to praise God. He should be an example to the flock in this regard. Every minister of Christ should learn to sing as well as to pray. If he has not been instructed, he is wanting in one most important qualification for his work. There should be a choir. A precentor will prove a failure. Because some of our large assemblies are successfully led by a single voice, there are those who suppose that a precentor will be sufficient for the leading of the praises of the sanctuary. But it should be remembered that our anniversary gatherings, and our great convocations, are made up of the *select ones* from many different quarters; and in them are grouped together such an array of voices as cannot be found in any ordinary congregation. I say there should be a choir. But its leader should by all means be a devout man, knowing what it means to praise God. And the choir should not be made up without reference to the spiritual dignity and importance of the service in which they are to lead. The young people who gather in the choir will need to be supported and balanced by those of calmer and maturer age. The Asaphs, the Hemans, and the Jeduthuns, must make some sacrifice, if necessary, that they may not vacate their places in the choir before those places can be judiciously and safely filled. The pastor and the elders should often attend upon the rehearsals of the choir, not only to show their interest in the subject, but to maintain their proper supervision, and to continually remind the singers of the sacredness and spirituality of the service which it is at once their honor and their privilege to lead. At these rehearsals, the blessing of God should always be invoked, and at least one hymn should be sung, not critically, but devotionally, with such comments as the leader, the pastor, or an elder present, may add to enforce the spiritual significance of the words. The organist should be a Christian; for how can a man who is destitute of true religious emotions make that noble instrument express, in harmony and melody, genuine Christian feeling? how can he make it speak *to* or *for* the hearts of the worshippers? And, as already intimated, the people should not be denied their rightful privilege of joining in the service. Rather, by all possible means, they should be invited and stimulated to the discharge of this sacred duty. The music should be put before them with the hymns. A "hymn-tune book" is an invaluable help to secure the proper habits in the congregation. Its very presence in the pew is a direct invitation to the occupants to join in the worship. When such a book has been introduced, it will be both pleasant and profitable for the congregation occasionally to be invited to remain after the weekly lecture or prayer-meeting, or after some other public service, to rehearse together, both for their improvement in

singing, and for devotional enjoyment. I think when we get to heaven, and join the unnumbered choir, we shall wonder, not that we had so many meetings for prayer, but that we had so few meetings for praise. The hymn-tune book will secure many important ends. It will secure the proper adaptation of the tune to the hymn ; it will prevent the choir from singing that in which the congregation cannot join ; it will speak continually to the people concerning their responsibility to aid in the praises of God ; and its tendency will be to make the music of the home the same with that of the church. It will not deprive the choir of the privilege of singing something by themselves, thus exerting an elevating influence upon the congregation. They can sing an introductory anthem at every service ; and by the style and spirit of the performance, they can make the people feel the refining and stimulating power of a worthy example. The pastor can do much good by occasionally preaching to his people upon this subject, and by showing, by his example, that he feels its importance. It will be necessary, especially in the country, that the church be at some pains and expense to promote musical instruction. They may, to a great advantage, occasionally secure the temporary services of a teacher from abroad. It may be excellent economy for them to select a suitable Christian young man from their own number, and, at their own expense, send him where he can receive thorough culture ; for he will come back to them to make his influence felt through all the congregation for many years. This will cost something ; but it cost David something to provide four thousand instruments of music for the Levites, and to educate and maintain the choir of two hundred and eighty-eight chosen singers ; and can we, any more than he, expect to offer unto God, in acceptable sacrifice, that which has cost us nothing ?

If these practical principles are adopted, in dependence upon God's blessing, I know—(it is not a theory with me)—I know that there will be the best results ; and we shall cease to hear complaints of choirs, or to be afflicted in the sanctuary with the jargon of discordant voices ; or to be insulted there with the flippancy and pretension of music and musicians, that are borrowed from the devil, devoted to his service during the week, but lent, or hired out, to the service of God on the Sabbath.

There are many other things which press for consideration, but I must relieve your patience.

My brethren, we have a work to do with reference to this subject, which we have already neglected too long. God is not so honored in our churches as he should be. The glory of his great name is dear to our hearts. Let us then, I pray you, see to it that praise, true, Christian praise, waits for him ever in our sanctuaries. There is power with God not only in prayer.

but also in praise. Praise consummates prayer. God often waits to bestow his blessing till he hears the voice of Christian song. When Judah was threatened by "the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir,"* then Jehosaphat did not only pray, but he appointed "Singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army." And it was when they began to sing and to praise, that the Lord interfered for their deliverance, and smote their enemies. And, at the dedication of the Temple, it was when the singers "lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying : For he in good ; for his mercy endureth forever"—it was then, and not during the sacrifice or the prayer, that the Temple was filled with a cloud, "so that the priests could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud ; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."† It was when Paul and Silas *sang praises*, as well as prayed, that their bands were loosed and the prison-doors were thrown open. So has it always been, and so will it always be, for our God is jealous of his honor, and waits to be gracious till we give unto him the glory due unto his name. Praise is the fitting language for the soul's deepest thought and highest aspiration. God our Maker giveth "songs in the night." The Christian, when his anguish is too deep for ordinary expression, breaks forth into song, and so finds relief. I saw a believer whose sorrow I knew was superlative, stand by the open grave, which was to receive all that was dearest to her heart, and sing, when those who were not bereaved could only weep. The mother of the Wesleys, when dying, said to her weeping children gathered around her : "*Children, when I am gone, sing a psalm of praise !*" What relief, alleviation, and comfort, can the soul find that can lift itself toward God in song. The pilgrim quickens his footsteps with the hymn of hope and heaven ; the bravest soldier is he who can sing as he marches to the battle. When the sailor can sing at the windlass, then the anchor is light ! Song quickens the pulses of Christian living, lightens its burdens, alleviates its sufferings, soothes its sorrows, allays its fears, and stimulates its hopes. Brethren, the church of Jesus Christ, while militant, should ever be vocal, and eloquent with her psalm and hymn of praise. With such a God and such a gospel every one should sing. Oh ! that we and our people should be filled with the Spirit, that the Word of Christ might dwell richly in us and in them ! Then would all our sanctuaries be resonant with those true heart-melodies, which are sweeter to the ear of the Father than the songs of angels, because they connect with that sacramental hymn which Jesus sang just before he went to the Mount of Olives.

* 2 Chron. 20 : 22.

† 2 Chron. 5 : 13.

SERMON XII.

[A short Discourse.]

BY AN EMINENT MINISTER AND PREACHER.

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."—LUKE xxiv : 27.

THE example of Christ in this wonderful incident of his life on earth, is full of interest and full of instruction to his ministering servants. The great question with every preacher is, or should be, How can I so "divide the word of truth" as best to answer the great end of preaching—the conversion of sinners and the "edifying of the body of Christ?" With regard to the *matter* of religious instruction, Christ has given no discretionary choice to his ministers. They may not "go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more." They must "preach the preaching which their Master hath bidden them, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." But he has not restricted them to any one mode of imparting religious instruction. Having commissioned them to speak in his name, and put the Bible into their hands as their divine commission, he seems to have left it with them, to preach doctrinally, practically and experimentally, with notes, or without notes, from single texts or by "expounding the Scriptures in order" to their hearers, giving to each its due proportion.

The Apostles and other primitive preachers adopted the *expository* method. If they ever discoursed from insulated texts, we have no record of it; and long after the apostolic age, preaching was almost wholly expository. There was a gradual departure from this method, till in process of time, preaching took the form of didactic discourse from separate topics, which for the most part, it retains to the present day. Exposition has not perhaps gone entirely out of us, any where. Preachers generally, I believe, expound more or less, in their week day evening lectures, and some few adhere to the primitive method, half a day on the Sabbath; but if I mistake not, the tendency now is, towards adopting the textual method altogether. This arises, I suppose, either from a conviction on the part of ministers, that the modern way of preaching is the best, or from a decided preference for it, on the part of their hearers.

In this state of things, it is seasonable to inquire, whether "the old paths" have not been too much forsaken.

1. My *first* argument in favor of the expository method is, that it is greatly for the advantage of the preacher himself. I do not mean, that it is a labor-saving method of pulpit instruction. It may cost quite as much study to prepare an exposition of a chapter, or part of a chapter, as to write out a sermon in the usual form—it will often cost more. But by taking up a gospel, an epistle, or any book of the Old Testament, and going regularly through it, with such helps as are at hand, the pastor will study it more carefully, and be more thoroughly "instructed into the things of the kingdom," than if he were to be a mere textual preacher. In this way, he will get much more comprehensive views of divine truth in its relations and practical bearings, than in any other. He will have a fuller "treasure," a richer mind, than if he were to spend all his time in looking out texts, making skeletons, and clothing them in the common way. He will make better sermons for it; and make them easier. If he is not a more polished writer, or eloquent orator, he will be a more Biblical preacher, and this will be a decided advantage to his flock, as well as to himself.

2. Another argument is, that a preacher can adopt a more familiar style in exposition, than he ordinarily can in a set discourse. He can simplify and illustrate—he can come down, as it were, and put himself more directly in communication with common minds. He ought, indeed, always to aim at this; but every one who has tried it will testify, that there is an inherent difficulty in making a sermon as simple and familiar to all minds, as an exposition.

3. A *third* advantage of expository over didactic preaching is, that it brings up truths in all their relations and just proportions. When we take insulated texts and draw out a doctrine, however true or important, we are extremely liable to overlook whatever does not serve our turn in a systematic technical way, and thus to lose much of "the mind and will of the Spirit" in the connection. How often have ministers, after preaching from a single verse in some important chapter, and subsequently going carefully through it in the expository way, found that the sermon was quite defective, in more than one particular.

4. Another advantage of the expository method is, that it brings up topics, thoughts, and illustrations, which might never occur to us in the common method; and if they did, we should find it next to impossible ever to weave half of them into formal sermons. The sacred writers, in one way and another, touch upon every thing that pertains to men's duty and interests, in all the countless circumstances and relations of life—all the duties, moreover, which we owe to God, and our fellow-men.

Nothing is left out. Nothing is overlooked. Expository preaching brings out every thing that "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" and every thing in its connection with what goes before and after.

5. Another, and a very great advantage of expository preaching is, that it brings up and brings out all those doctrines and practical subjects at which men are most apt to cavil, in such a way they must see that the preacher cannot help insisting on them without a manifest "shunning to declare all the counsel of God." When he takes an unwelcome text, they may say he is personal, or that he is always harping upon subjects which he knows they wish he would let alone; but when, in the course of exposition, one subject comes up after another, they are constrained to be silent, or to quarrel directly with the sacred writers. In such a course, it often happens that a bow drawn, as it were at a venture, does more execution than if it had been obviously aimed at a particular mark.

6. Another, and the last advantage of expository preaching which I shall mention is, that in a course of years, it makes a congregation much better acquainted with the Scriptures, than they are ever likely to become, under exclusively textual preaching. I take it as a matter of course, that when a minister expounds a part of the time in the pulpit, the congregation will all have their Bibles or Testaments, and follow him carefully, as he goes over verse after verse and chapter after chapter. In this way, they will see the connection and take the force of the reasoning, and when the book is finished, they will understand the scope and meaning of a writer, as the majority of them never would have done, without some such help.

In ten years, a preacher taking but one-third of the time in his regular Sabbath ministrations, might expound the whole New Testament and the greater part of the Old, with great profit to his hearers, and at the same time give increased interest to his textual preaching.